

ORESTHEUM OR ORESTHASION IN ARCADIA

Pausanias while travelling through Southwest Arcadia, reported seeing the ruins of Oresthasion¹ on the right of the road from Megalopolis to Asea², somewhere between the villages of Haimoniai³ and Athenaion⁴:

[1] What is left of my account of Arcadia is the road from Megalopolis to Pallantion and Tegea, the road which leads to the Mound. The area in front of the city along this road is named Ladokeia after Ladokos son of Echemos; beyond this in ancient times was the city of HAIMONIAI, the site of which has kept its name to this day. [2] Among the remnants to be recorded of the city of ORESTHASION, on the right of the road after Haimoniai, some columns of the SANCTUARY OF ARTEMIS are still standing; the title of Artemis is the Priestess. Along the straight road from Haimoniai is APHRODISION and then another place called ATHENAION, on the left of which is a temple of Athene with a stone statue in it. [3] Just

¹ Also known as Oresteum (PAUS., VIII, 3, 2; PLUTARCH, *Aristides*, 10) or Orestheum (HERODOTUS, IX, 11; THUCYDIDES, V, 64); for the linguistics of the matter and the interchange of the letters *θ* and *τ*, see E. MEYER in *R.E.*, XVIII, 1014 ff.; the city was abandoned in 368 B.C. and its inhabitants moved to Megalopolis (PAUS., VIII, 27, 3); not to be confused with Orestia, a quarter of Megalopolis (STEPHANUS BYZANTIUS, s.v. *Μεγάλη Πόλις*).

² "As the military road from Sparta must have entered the Asean plain from the south, it becomes probable that Oresthasium was in the southern part of that plain, and hence that the ancient road from Megalopolis to Asea, Pallantium, and Tegea followed the most southern of the passes. This pass which rises to a height of 1000 feet above the Megalopolitan and 300 feet above the Asean plain, starts from a point a little south of the village of Rapsomati and descends into the Asea plain near the village of Marmaria" (J. G. FRAZER, *Pausanias' Description of Greece*, IV, p. 412).

³ Placed near the modern village of Perivolia [W. LORING, in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 15 (1895), p. 31; Y. PIKOULAS, *Ἡ Νότια Μεγαλοπολίτικη χώρα*, Athens, 1988, p. 90].

⁴ Placed near modern Frankovrysi [LEAKE, *Pelop.*, p. 247 and *Morea*, II, p. 83; BURSIA, *Geogr.*, II, p. 227; PHILIPPSON, *Pelopones*, p. 88; LORING, in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 15 (1895), p. 32].

two and a half miles or so from Athenaion lie the ruins of ASEA, and the hill which was once its fortress still shows traces of the defence wall⁵.

The matter of Orestheum has attracted considerable speculation among historians and to this day no one knows where the village was situated. According to tradition it was supposedly founded either by Orestheus a son of Lycaon⁶ or by Orestes the son of Agamemnon who was believed to have resided there after the murder of Clytemnestra⁷. It is possible, however, that the name Oresthasion was given to a village called Orestheum, by the Lacedaemonians once it came under their control⁸. Herodotus (IX, 11) and Thucydides (V, 64) recreate the circumstances through which we can become familiar with Orestheum's role in history.

In 479 B.C. as the Athenians were evacuating their city for a second time in ten months, and as Mardonius was stating his demand for their surrender from nearby Boeotia, the Peloponnesians were unable to send help because of the Hyacinthia⁹; or at least that is what they claimed. The Athenians, having recognized the possibility that their allies may never appear in battle against Mardonius, at least not until the Persians were to attack the Spartans' wall at the Isthmus, decided to send a delegation of allies threatening vengeance. The delegation, composed of representatives from Megara, Athens, and Plataea, met with the Ephors at Sparta and was told to wait for a response over a number of days. As time passed the envoys became angry and prepared to leave Sparta when they were informed that a force of Spartan hoplites had left for Athens the night before,

⁵ PAUS., VIII, 44, 1-3; translated by Peter Levi.

⁶ "... Lycaon's other sons founded cities wherever each of them preferred. Pallas and Orestheus and Phigalos founded Pallantion and Oresthasion and Phigalia" (PAUS., VIII, 3, 1) translated by Peter Levi.

⁷ "... in the course of time Phigalia and Oresthasion changed their names, and came to be called Oresteion after Orestes the son of Agamemnon and Phialia after Boukolion's son Phialos..." (PAUS., VIII, 3, 2) translated by Peter Levi. See also EURIPIDES, *Orestes*, 1645-1647, and *Electra*, 1273-1275.

⁸ For the Spartan attempts to impose their mythology, or to associate themselves with the pre-Doric mythology of Arcadia see: Χρ. ΚΑΡΔΑΡΑ, *Αρχαϊκή Πολιτική της Σπάρτης*, Athens, 1975.

⁹ "An annual solemnity at Amyclae, in Laconia, in honour of Hyacinthus and Apollo" (L'EMPRÉRIE'S *Classical Dictionary*).

and was believed to be at Orestheum that very moment. The final events of this affair reappear below, as Herodotus narrates them ¹⁰ :

11. Οἱ μὲν δὴ οὖν Πανσανίῃ ἐξεληλύθεσαν ἔξω Σπάρτης· οἱ δὲ ἄγγελοι, ὥς ἡμέρῃ ἐγεγόνεε, οὐδὲν εἰδότες περὶ τῆς ἐξόδου ἐπῆλθον ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐφόρους, ἐν νόῳ δὴ ἔχοντες ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστος· ἐπελθόντες δὲ ἔλεγον τάδε· “Ὑμεῖς μὲν, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, αὐτοῦ τῇδε μένοντες Ὑακίνθιά τε ἄγετε καὶ παίζετε, καταπροδόντες τοὺς συμμάχους· Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ὥς ἀδικεόμενοι ὑπὸ ὑμέων χήτεϊ τε συμμάχων καταλύσονται τῷ Πέρσῃ οὕτω ὅπως ἂν δύνωνται· καταλυσάμενοι δέ, δῆλα γὰρ ὅτι σύμμαχοι Βασιλέος γινόμεθα, συστρατευσόμεθα ἐπ’ ἣν ἂν ἐκεῖνοι ἐξηγέωνται. ὑμεῖς δὲ τὸ ἐνθεῦτεν μαθήσεσθε ὁκοῖον ἂν τι ὑμῖν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐκβαίνει.” ταῦτα λεγόντων τῶν ἀγγέλων, οἱ ἐφοροὶ εἶπαν ἐπ’ ὅρκου καὶ δὴ δοκέειν εἶναι ἐν Ὀρεσθείῳ στείχοντας ἐπὶ τοὺς ξείνους. ξείνους γὰρ ἐκάλεον τοὺς βαρβάρους. οἱ δὲ ὥς οὐκ εἰδότες ἐπειρώτων τὸ λεγόμενον, ἐπειρόμενοι δὲ ἐξέμαθον πᾶν τὸ ἐόν, ὥστε ἐν θώματι γενόμενοι ἐπορεύοντο τὴν ταχίστην διώκοντες· σὺν δὲ σφι τῶν περιοίκων Λακεδαιμονίων λογάδες πεντακισχίλιοι ὀπλῖται τῶντ’ οὗτο ἐποίησαν.

12. Οἱ μὲν δὴ ἐς τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἠπείγοντο·

Translation

11. So Pausanias' army had marched away from Sparta ; but as soon as it was day, the envoys came before the ephors, having no knowledge of the expedition, and being minded themselves to depart each one to his own place ; and when they were come, "You Lacedaemonians", they said, "abide still where you are, keeping your Hyacinthia and disporting yourselves, leaving your allies deserted ; the Athenians, for the wrong that you do them and for lack of allies, will make their peace with the Persians as best they can, and thereafter, seeing that plainly we shall be the King's allies, we will march with him against whatever land his men lead us. Then will you learn what the issue of this matter shall be for you." Thus spoke the envoys ; and the ephors swore to them that they believed their army to be even now at Orestheum, marching against the strangers as they called the foreigners. Having no knowledge of this, the envoys questioned

¹⁰ HERODOTUS, IX, 11 ; HOW and WELLS in their *Commentary on Herodotus* rely on Loring's conclusions.

them further as to what the tale might mean, and thereby learnt the whole truth; where at they marvelled, and took the road with all speed after the army; and with them went likewise five thousand chosen men-at-arms of the Lacedaemonian country-men.

12. So they made haste to reach the Isthmus ¹¹.

Herodotus' passage can be divided into three parts. First, the envoys accuse the Lacedaemonians of unwillingness to fight; secondly, the Lacedaemonians repel the insult by a strong response of assurance that the Spartan hoplites are already on the way to Athens through Orestheum; and thirdly, the envoys, having been persuaded, follow with additional troops.

In the second part, the Lacedaemonians who wish to demonstrate the urgency with which their expeditionary force is moving, at that very moment, toward the Corinthian Isthmus, use as a reference point the site of Oresthasion. Why would they name that particular village if not so as to attempt to reduce the anxiety of the envoys by providing some kind of evidence of their honest intention of arriving in Athens in the shortest period of time. It would, no doubt, have been an insult to the Athenians if the Spartans had used as a reference point a site far off the direct road to the Isthmus. Thus the envoys, on the third part, having been convinced of the Spartan intention to assist them, set after the army with all speed (*τιν ταχίστην*) and make haste (*ἡνείκοντο*) to reach the Isthmus.

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In 419 B.C. in the middle of the Peloponnesian War, the Argives thought it best to attack Epidaurus in order to secure a safe passage-way for Athenian reinforcements across the Saronic Gulf. A year later, in an attempt to help Epidaurus, the Lacedaemonians launched an attack on the city of Argos. The campaign was interrupted by a peace between King Agis of Sparta and a few Argives. Athens applied pressure on Argos to break the truce and upon agreeing to do so the Argives, in concordance with Mantinea and Elis, invaded Arcadia. In order to protect Tegea, the Lacedaemonians dispatched a large force which on its way north stopped briefly at

¹¹ The Loeb Classical Library. Translated by A. D. GODLEY.

Orestheum. Thucydides, our authority on the events of this era, wrote :

64. Ἐν τούτῳ δ' ἀφικνεῖται αὐτοῖς ἀγγελία παρὰ τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἐκ Τεγέας ὅτι, εἰ μὴ παρέσονται ἐν τάχει, ἀποστήσεται αὐτῶν Τεγέα πρὸς Ἀργεῖους καὶ τοὺς ξυμμάχους καὶ ὅσον οὐκ ἀφέστηκεν. ἔνταῦθα δὴ βοήθεια τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων γίνεται αὐτῶν τε καὶ τῶν Εἰλωτῶν πανδημεὶ ὀξεῖα καὶ οἷα οὔπω πρότερον. ἔχωρουν δὲ ἐς Ὀρέσθειον τῆς Μαιναλίας· καὶ τοῖς μὲν Ἀρκάδων σφετέροις οὔσι ξυμμάχοις προεῖπον ἀθροισθεῖσιν ἵεναι κατὰ πόδας αὐτῶν ἐς Τεγέαν, αὐτοὶ δὲ μέχρι μὲν τοῦ Ὀρεσθείου πάντες ἐλλόντες, ἐκεῖθεν δὲ τὸ ἕκτον μέρος σφῶν αὐτῶν ἀποπέμψαντες ἐπ' οἴκου, ἐν ᾧ τὸ πρεσβύτερόν τε καὶ τὸ νεώτερον ἦν, ὥστε τὰ οἴκοι φρουρεῖν, τῷ λοιπῷ στρατεύματι ἀφικνοῦνται ἐς Τεγέαν¹².

Translation

64. Meanwhile word came from their friends in Tegea that, unless they should come quickly, Tegea would go over to the Argives and their allies, and already had all but done so. Where upon succour was sent, both of the Lacedaemonians themselves and of the Helots, in full force, promptly and on such a scale as never before. These advanced to Orestheum in Maenalia, and gave orders to their allies among the Arcadians to get together and come close upon their heels to Tegea. After going all together as far as the Orestheum, they sent home from there a sixth part of their force — in which were included the older and younger men — to keep guard at home, and with the remainder of their army reached Tegea, where not long afterwards the allies from Arcadia arrived¹³.

In this passage the Lacedaemonians are warned that unless they should come quickly (*εἰ μὴ παρέσονται ἐν τάχει*) Tegea will be lost to the Argives. Realizing the urgency that is demanded of them here, they respond massively and swiftly (*πανδημεὶ ὀξεῖα*) by going through Orestheum. Although the intentions of the Lacedaemonians in the previous passage (HERODOTUS, IX, 11) could be questioned, here no one can possibly suggest that the Spartans would go north through an out of the way village, at a time as critical to their own

¹² THUCYDIDES, V, 64. GOMME writes "Oresthasion is to be sought close to Megalopolis" (*Commentary on Thucydides*, IV, p. 93).

¹³ The Loeb Classical Library. Translated by Charles FOSTER SMITH.

interests as this. Once more Oresthasion is on the quickest way to a northern, from Sparta, destination.

MODERN TRAVELLERS

Although Pausanias gives an approximate geographical position for Oresthasion, his comments are not helpful to determine the location of the ruins. Oresthasion could have been on either side of Mt. Tsemberou and still conform to Pausanias' description, i.e. south of the road. Drawn by this ambiguity in Pausanias' description, several modern historians have surveyed the region and formulated theories as to the whereabouts of the lost town.

Leake first suggested that Oresthasion was on the summit of Mt. Tsemberou ¹⁴, but later abandoned the idea, placing it this time near the village of Marmaria ¹⁵.

Bursian relying on Pausanias' description of the area placed it on the western side of Tsemberou ¹⁶.

Concerning the topography of the area, Loring wrote that "it is impossible to suppose that the Spartan route to Asea was via the Megalopolitan plain; — this would only be credible if the passes south of Tsimbarou, leading directly from the Lakonian plain to the Asea, were exceptionally high or difficult; and they are not. The Spartan route must have passed south and east of Tsimbarou; Oresthasium, therefore, since it was on the Spartan route, must have been east, not west, of that hill, and was therefore in the plain of Asea" ¹⁷.

¹⁴ *Morea*, II, 138. LEAKE also reported to have seen fortifications on the same summit (elevation 1254 m) "Oresthasium, otherwise Oresteium, I conceive to have occupied the summit of Mount Tzimbaru, on which conspicuous point there are still some remains of a Hellenic fortress. The situation very much resembles that of many of the ancient Arcadian πόλεις and indeed that of the fortresses of every part of Greece in the early stages of its society; Tzimbaru lay to the right of the road from Megalopolis to Asea, in the part where it crossed the ridge between Haemoniae and Athenaeum, and this is precisely the point where Pausanias mentions Oresthasium", p. 319.

¹⁵ *Peloponnesiaca*, pp. 247-248.

¹⁶ *Geographie von Griechenland*, Leipzig, 1872, p. 227.

¹⁷ *J.H.S.*, 15 (1895), pp. 28-30.

While surveying the eastern slopes of Tsemberou, Loring came across ruins on the low hill of Agia Triada. He described these remains in the following manner :

On its southern slope [i.e. the hill's slope] is a chapel, still standing of Agia Triada, and on its northern slope a ruined chapel of Ag. Giannakes. Built into the former are several hewn blocks of limestone of Hellenic workmanship ; while built into the rude walls of the latter, but hidden by the debris, I found several pieces of worked marble, including among others a small fragment of a Doric column and a complete metope (unsculptured) and triglyph from a Doric frieze. The marble must have come from a considerable distance, and therefore the temple to which they belonged was probably of some importance.

Besides these remains of a temple, there are abundant traces of human habitation — rude walls, partially or completely buried, and coarse pottery ; but to none of these can an ancient date be confidently assigned.

Here then was certainly an ancient temple ; probably but not certainly, an ancient town or village. It is just where we have been led on other grounds to look for Oresthasium ¹⁸.

A. Petronotis places it at Kamarakia (see Map I) where he found sherds of the fourth century B.C. ¹⁹. However, since Kamarakia is located a good distance west of Mt. Tsemberou ²⁰, his proposal runs counter to the ancient testimony that Oresthasion was on the direct road from Sparta to the Isthmus.

W. K. Pritchett, after surveying the area, made the following comments concerning Oresthasion :

Although I have been unable to find ceramic evidence which would clinch the matter of the site of Oresthasion, I believe that there are supporting arguments in favor of Loring's belief that the site is not to be sought in the Megalopolis plain. This conclusion rests on a study of the passes and roads of pre-automobile date ²¹.

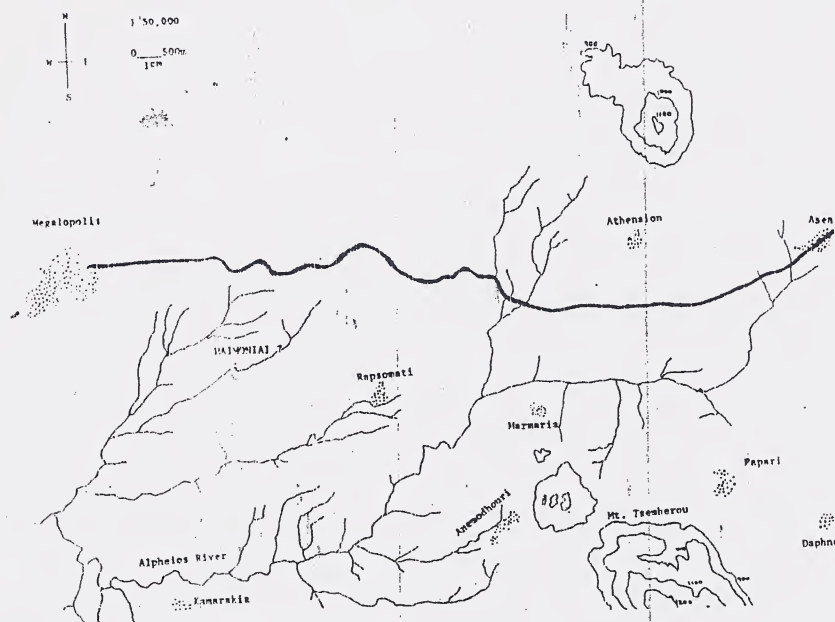
And in greater detail, according to Pritchett, "Thucydides provides one positive indication about the road from Sparta past Oresthasion in telling us that the Spartans in 418 B.C. arrived at Mantinea with

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁹ *Η Μεγάλη Πόλις τῆς Ἀρκαδίας*, Athens, 1973, p. 157.

²⁰ Approximately 4,000 m.

²¹ W. K. PRITCHETT, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, IV, 1982, p. 30.



MAP 1

wagons (5.72.3)". His search, "accordingly, was not simply for mule trails, but for traces of cart roads over or around mount Tsemherou" ²². Further on in his commentary he reports:

Our search for a road of the 'cut and terrace' variety was soon rewarded. To the right of the modern Skortsinou-to-Papari road are long stretches, always lower in the valley. The natives of Papari first directed us to a section which can easily be traced for two or more kilometers. The width varies from 1.40 to 1.70 m. ... On the Asean side, the road disappears in the terraced fields of the last incline before descending into the Papari plain. The loss of the route here was particularly unfortunate because one might hope to find ceramic evidence for an ancient site at the road's outlet ²³.

If Pritchett's interpretation of the road system is correct, the only direct way northward to Mantinea would be via the Asean plain. "In conclusion" Pritchett declares: "I would support Leake's opinion

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

that Mainalian Oresthasion must be sought east of the crest of Mount Tsemberou" ²⁴.

The latest of these surveys was conducted by Y. Pikoulas, and its results were announced first in the XIIth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, held in Athens from September 4 to 10, 1983 and later incorporated in his doctoral dissertation ²⁵.

Relying on phrases such as Thucydides' (IV, 134, 1) *ἐν Λαδοκείῳ τῆς Ὀρεσθίδος* and (V, 64, 3) *Ὀρέσθειον τῆς Μαιναλίας*, Polybius' (II, 51, 3) *ἐν Λαδοκείῳ καλουμένοις τῆς Μεγαλοπολίτιδος*, and Pausanias' (VIII, 44, 1) *Λαδοκεία ... τὰ πρὸ τοῦ ἄστεως*, he concludes that since all of the above toponyms are connected both with the plain of Megalopolis and with Oresthasion, the latter is located on the same plain as the rest. Oresthasion, he continues, must have been near the village of Anemodhouri as ruins and pot-sherds from the area seem to suggest. Having also discovered an ancient road with wheel ruts on it, he connects it to the site by proposing that it was the outer most end of the Spartan military road system in the area and that it led to Oresthasion (i.e. Anemodhouri). He finalizes his theory by declaring that a "direct" way from Sparta northward was both impossible and incomprehensible ²⁶.

Pikoulas' argument is not acceptable. *Ὀρέσθειον τῆς Μαιναλίας* (Thuc., V, 64, 3) is not a precise topographical term since Oresthasion may be also found in the company of other towns "of Mainalia" such as Asea, Alycaea and Eutaia (PAUSANIAS, VIII, 27). As a matter of fact, Oresthasion's inclusion in the company of all these cities can only suggest that it may have been located in the same area as they; the plain of Asca east of Mt. Tsemberou.

As far as a direct road not being possible Pritchett correctly observed that "once one arrived at Skortsinou after inspecting the terrain on all sides of Mount Tsemberou, it appears clear that instead of going around three sides of a square, as it were, to reach Asea, a direct route would be northward through the Skortsinou pass at the southern base of Mount Tsemberou by way of the modern Skortsinou-Papari road" ²⁷.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁵ Γ. Α. ΠΙΚΟΥΛΑΣ, *Ἡ Νότια Μεγαλοπολίτικη Χώρα*, Athens, 1988.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁷ W. K. PRITCHETT, *op. cit.* (above n. 21).

It is safe to assume that Oresthasion was a focal point in the network of roads between Sparta, Megalopolis and Asea, and so would require to be in such a site as to either control the connection point of the roads Megalopolis-Asea and Sparta-Asea, or the pass leading to the intersection of these two roads. Such advantages are offered by only two places along the way to the north: Agia Triada and the low hillside across the village of Daphne (see Map 2). Although both of these spots would be able to check the road system of the plain, only Agia Triada is in a position to guard the three lower entrances into the plain of Asea from the west: these being a) the natural way created by the Alpheios, b) what has become the path of Rapsomati²⁸, running parallel to the Alpheios, and c) the Anemodhouri-Papari way²⁹. That possibility of control was understood by the builders of the tower there³⁰. The Spartans would have seen the advantages of the site as well, and they must have utilized them especially since the pass south of Rapsomati is too strategically attractive to be left unattended.

Today there exist three man made roads that connect Papari with Marmaria (see Map 3). The most northern of these is of considerable age, and according to the locals it was a "kalderimi" until the resistance forces of the area increased its width more than forty years ago. This path will take you directly to the hill of Agia Triada, as it passes under the view of the Paleos Pyrgos on its left. The second from the west or middle road passes directly under the hill of Agia Triada and from that height it is impossible to see the church as it hides among pine and cypress trees³¹. The third road runs through the cultivated fields of the plain and has been created by the locals for this purpose alone.

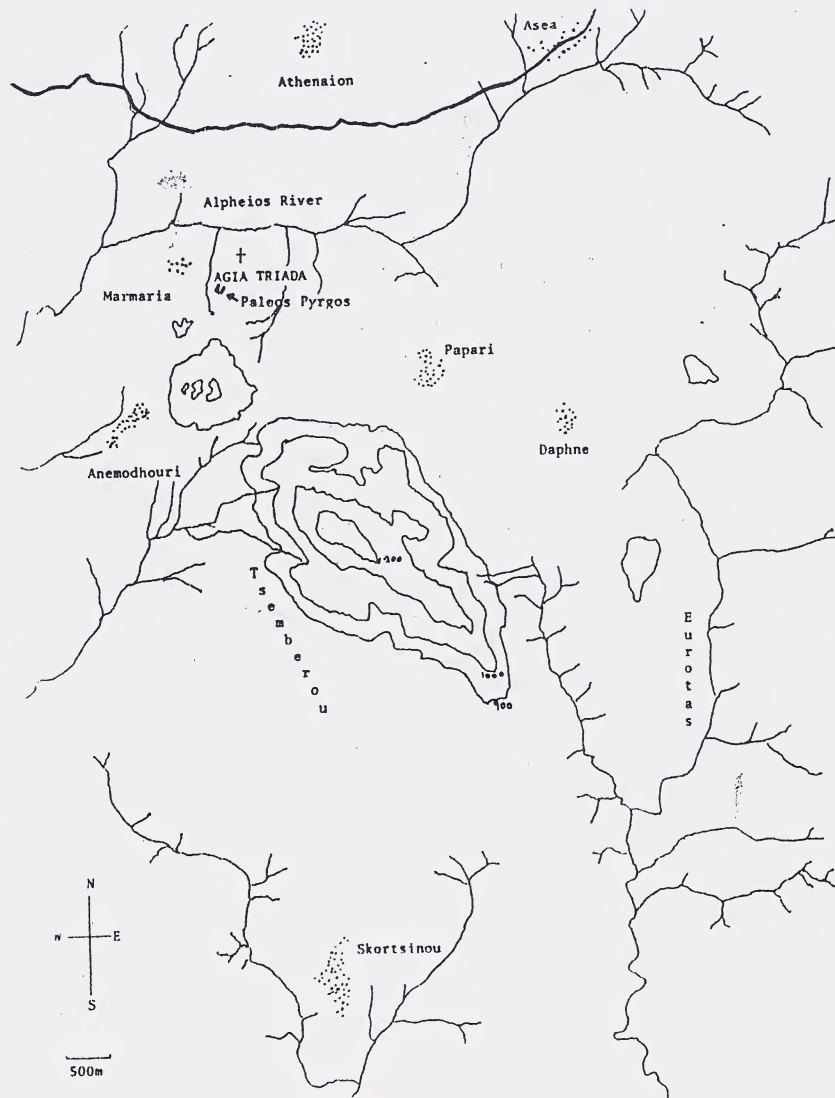
The church of Agia Triada is totally rebuilt. New tiles on the roof, new stones at the bases of its walls and a thick cement and

²⁸ See note 2.

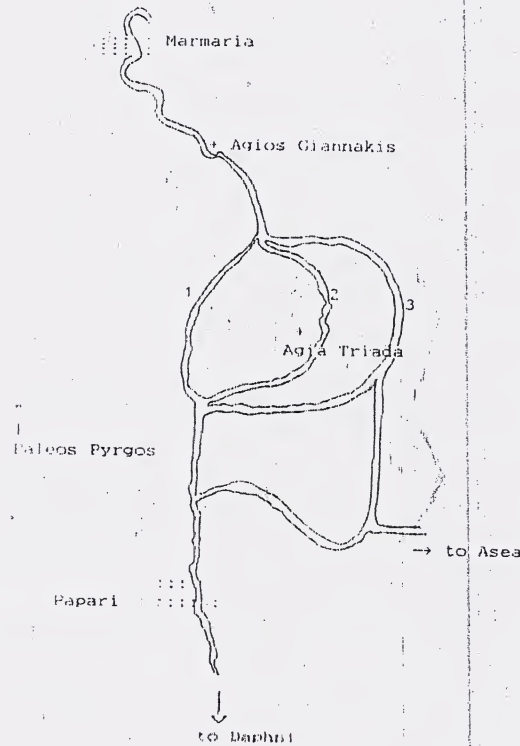
²⁹ GELL was the first to report the existence of this path in his *Itinerary of the Morea*, London, 1817, pp. 137-138. More details are given in his *Narrative of a Journey in the Morea*, London, 1823, pp. 170-175.

³⁰ Pritchett dates it as Roman; Pikoulas places its construction in the Middle Ages.

³¹ This road will take you to the small church of Agios Giannakes. The church is rebuilt just as M. Jost reported [*R.E.A.*, 75 (1973), p. 246, n. 1] and marble can be seen all around the outer surface of its walls.



MAP 2



MAP 3

mud mixture covers all previously placed material. Today no worked stones can be seen either on the courtyard or in the walls of the building. The hill top (48 m X 50 m) is surrounded by what seems to have been a Byzantine fortification wall. In the southwest corner two worked stones can be seen together with an abundance of unworked smaller ones that apparently were once part of a building standing at that particular spot. Taking into consideration Loring's findings together with the topographical importance of the hill one

can safely conclude that a settlement with a temple existed here in antiquity. This I assume to have been Orestheum.

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In conclusion, since our knowledge of Orestheum's possible location stems out of two incidents, both of which were events of crisis that demanded the quick deployment of Spartan troops to a northern destination, any hypothesis concerning the temporary bivouacing of these troops must be made with the urgency of their tactical deployment in mind. Mt. Tsemberou is a physical obstacle. It would, in other words, have been unproductive for the Spartans to put a barrier 1200 m high on their way, especially at moments critical to their existence.

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